

# Happy Valley's Name Origin Belongs to Realtors, not Folklore

*By Mark Hurlburt*



The origin of the name for the City of Happy Valley, in northern Clackamas County, has been traditionally associated with a folkloric legend of community boys getting happily drunk from apple cider. According to “The History of Happy Valley,” compiled by the elementary school students in 1969, these boys attended church services at Sunnyside “singing loudly and gaily.” They were referred to as “the happy boys from the hollow” and after a while the area became known as “Happy Valley.” While this story from folklore may be true, new research contradicts this story as the reason why Happy Valley ultimately received its name as its actual origin might more plausibly belong to realtors.

The City of Happy Valley has had many names in its history. First it was referred to as the “Deardorff Valley” and the “Deardorff Settlement,” named after the first settler family in the area; and as “Happy Hollow” from the folkloric story. Then, in a meeting held at the valley’s school in 1902, a new name was chosen for the community. An article in *The Sunday Oregonian* published in November of that year, announced, “The pioneer settlement in Clackamas County, southeast of Mount Scott, which has been called ‘Deardorff Valley’ and ‘Happy Hollow,’ will be known hereafter as ‘Christilla Valley.’” The name was a combination of Chris and Tilla Deardorff as a tribute to the first settlers in the valley. The community of farmers had seemingly decided on an official name for their area home, but the name “Christilla Valley” would not last for long.

After thorough research in The Oregonian Historical Archive and the Historic Oregon Newspapers archives, the earliest recorded use of the name “Happy Valley” in referring to the geographic area between Mount Scott, Scouters’ Mountain and Sunnyside, which the city consists of today, are found in classified ads selling acreage dated in September and October 1909. This was only seven years after the school meeting that decided the area would be known “hereafter as Christilla Valley.” Even before 1909, the use of the name Christilla Valley was often paired with the more well-known name Deardorff Settlement. The usage of Happy Hollow continued as well and valley residents even used the names Mount Scott, Portland and Lents in referring to where they lived. But despite all these different names for the same geographic area, only one was used by realtors in advertisements for selling acreage.

After searching through the classified advertisements in the newspaper archives mentioned earlier, the names Deardorff Settlement, Deardorff Valley, Happy Hollow and Christilla Valley were not found to be used by realtors. Only the name “Happy Valley” was used in selling land for that area. A simple reason why could be because there was no official name for the area and the farmers living there were just notably happy people. Another explanation could lie in terrible events that plagued the community at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1902, wildfires destroyed farmland in many parts of Clackamas County including in the valley where resident C. Zinser lost his house, one barn and all his grain and fences. It also took the efforts of 20 men to protect the schoolhouse from being destroyed. In 1904, a severe fire approaching from Gresham posed serious danger to Deardorff Valley farmhouses and caused much uneasiness among the residents. An *Oregonian* article covering the fires quoted a farmer living in the valley who stated that “with a fair wind there will be little chance of saving the farmhouses” as the area is “covered with a mass of brush and dry snags and logs, which would feed a fire and carry it forward at a great rate.” Following this event in 1904, another fire broke out in November of that year this time by the recklessness of a man which consumed his neighbor’s fence. To make things even more difficult for valley farmers, a pack of coyotes had invaded the area and were killing poultry and sheep. In the autumn of 1904, a hunt had to be formed of men with guns and hounds to kill the coyotes. But, according to an *Oregonian* article covering the hunt, the coyotes “were left unhurt” and were sent “skirmishing to the hills.” With these dispiriting events occurring in the valley, realtors might have needed a clever strategy to attract future land buyers. And, coincidentally, the name “Happy Valley” made its earliest recorded appearance in two real estate ads in 1909.

Could it be true that the name “Happy Valley” evolved from “Happy Hollow” as the legend says? Both names were used up until at least the 1940s and “Happy Valley” did not become the official name of the area until the community incorporated as a city in 1965. But an *Oregonian* article from September 25, 1932 shows them together as two separate names. The article was a listing of various hiking locations in the Portland Metro area. The listing for Happy Valley read, “Happy valley – Go to Lents junction. Take road going past Mount Scott cemetery and on to Happy valley.” And immediately below the listing for Happy Valley was a listing for Happy Hollow, “Happy hollow – Go to Lents junction. Tramp southeasterly over Deardorf valley road to Happy hollow...” If Happy Valley evolved from Happy Hollow, the use of the two names here is rather odd as they are both used to describe the same geographic area. An explanation for this is that these two names originated separately, one from Sunnyside with the cider drinking legend and the other from realtors as a way of inciting optimism.

Happy Valley began as a farming community and would remain that way until after World War II. Why then would a farmer want to purchase land in a place where farms were being destroyed by wildfires and poultry and sheep being stolen by coyotes? Unless they could be convinced by those already living in the Mount Scott area, a farmer would more likely buy land in such a place if it had an optimistic name - like the one that first appeared in real estate ads and, interestingly, was the only title used in identifying that area despite all its other more commonly known names. Today, most people probably move to Happy Valley because of its name, and it is in that optimism the name of the city likely originated from.

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